Vol. 4 No. 11

departure

A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Editors:
ROGER LONSDALE : JOHN MCGRATH

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VOLUME FOUR NUMBER ELEVEN

DONALD DAVIE

Sunrise in Fair Weather

(after Mickiewicz)

Fair weather, and the day breaking,
Day of Our Lady of Flowers;
The sky clear, hung over land
Like a sea curved forward and backward;
Pearls under its wave
Some few stars still, though paling.
White cloudlet alone
(Wing feathers fray out in the azure),
Spirit departing
Belated by prayers,
Fares fast to its heavenly fellows.

Pearls dim and go out in the deep.
Pallor on the sky's brow midmost
Spreads, and one temple is swarthy
(Bruised light, pillowed on shadows),
Another ruddy. The distant
Horizon parts like a lid
On the white of an eye
Iris and pupil, and a ray circles
Dazzles, a gold shaft stuck through the heart of a cloud.

Fires cluster and dart
Cross over, light over light
Overarches the sky-round;
Drowsy, a broken
Light under lashes shaken,
The eye of the sun rose up
Glittered, seven-tinted:
Sapphire by blood is to ruby
Ruby by yellow to topaz
Crystal, by lucent
To diamond, and by flame
Great moon or fitful star.
And the eye of the sun rose up
Alone across the unmeasured.

KENNETH PITCHFORD

Sunbather

Upon the banks of summer's wrinkled water,
the idiot stands adoring his mute sun.
Though time like a final chill beats in his ribs,
red wisdom warms him to his skeleton.

Poplars in rows, and far out on the lake,
a hosting of sharp sails against the sky . . .
these the day in ranks or shifted fragments
will waste upon his sight before it die.

He does not question how the day grows dark
and has no answer for the fatal brink
between the body eloquent in praise
and sun's translucent flesh before it sink.

He leans and dives, a momentary poise,
transient as water's glass that lacks the face
of him who peers in vain for his clear answer:
the idiot's wisdom swims in its disgrace.

But fresh from water on his patch of grass
he dozes and lies wiser than he knows
to whom is denied a look down that long street
where nightmares posture in their even rows.

PHILIP LARKIN

Pigeons

On shallow slates the pigeons shift together,
Backing to a thin rain from the west
Blown across each sunk head and settled feather.
Huddling round the warm stack suits them best,
Till winter daylight weakens, and they grow
Hardly defined against the brickwork. Soon,
Light from a small intense lop-sided moon
Shows them, black as their shadows, sleeping so.

DENNIS KEENE

A Ship Passes

Dark before dawn the voices are so near,
Are more than sounds, assemble to a morning
Where light's dull entry in the eyes is swarming
With shapes of birds that are controlled, are clear,

So clamorous and large they seem significant;
And would stay so, perhaps, and never blur,
Plain and secure; except that, being here,
Living by water, vision is wide and blunt

And knows no focus, all things being mirrored
Until what's seen must double-cross the eye
(The birds descending out of a clear sky
In the mind's flowing slowly are disfigured).

Thus each new thought of you painfully misses
The nearness it would make, and still you are
Oceans away and dark, and all that's clear
Is that an image unretained distresses

Like the last voyage made and passing
Into forgetfulness, whilst dead and still,
As behind any wake, every neat gull
Flops into mist, and silence is their falling.

DOM MORAES

Moz

I saw him turn to bluster, clutch his head,
The King of Moz, his thunders launched in vain:
The ageing queen slipped back into her bed,
Making one final gesture of disdain.

She flashed her eyes and passed beyond his yells,
Dying from her Moz, country of talking trees,
To strike a happy medium somewhere else.
The King came slowly to his royal knees.

A chirping twilight fell. She lay quietly.
Priests moved their hands and lips, imploring grace.
Her empty eyes looked up, where in the sky
Two stars resumed their long vacated place.

Wordless, I closed my heart. Now I return,
Amazed that stone endures and rivers move,
And persecute my friends with smiles, to learn
Their water rates, and have they been in love.

I clench my sleep upon a thought that springs
Out of a nervous kind of fixity:
The King passing his bedroom, touching things,
Trying vaguely to conceive eternity.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

by Irvin Ehrenpreis

DR WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS is now seventy-three years old. He has published dozens of books, mainly poetry, and stands as one of the major figures in modern American writing. Williams met Ezra Pound when they were both students at the University of Pennsylvania, and has been his friend since that time. Like Pound, he writes primarily in free verse, employing colloquial syntax. Keats and Walt Whitman have been among his admirations. His language is conscientiously American. The vocabulary runs to plain words interspersed with unexpected exotics. The underlying mood of energy, buoyancy, and optimism comes across best to a reader who goes through a great deal of Williams' short pieces. This good humour of cheerfulness has nothing to do with religion, for he is in no normal sense devout or pious. 'No one,' he says, 'expects now to go on living after death.'

In his most characteristic poems, Williams rarely talks about what he presents, but simply gives the object, person, or event as he finds it. He often builds up a picture, cuts across it with another picture, and then works back and forth between the two. And he frequently extends this sort of counterpoint by using several voices, present, past, immediate, absent, within or outside himself, all in ironic contrast or interplay. Instead of varying a traditional metrical pattern, he varies the kinds of speech, altering his tone by changing the evocations of his language or his point of view. He loves to repeat expressions in different contexts so as to renovate their significance.

Williams' fundamental attitude might be called exclamatory. He has noticed some startling and important relationship, and cannot resist showing you it. He believes in taking words as they are spoken about him and composing of them an 'expression of [his] perceptions and ardours . . . with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own.' The 'intrinsic movement' is essential, and his rhythms tend to grow specifically out of the work at hand. In 'The Dance', for example, he uses dactyls to give the *oom*-pah-pah of the music. To communicate the circular movement of the dancers, he ties his close to the start through the same phrase, and he repeats and rhymes on 'round'. Here one also observes his standard treatment of people: they are entrails, life, emotion, miracles. He cannot ridicule them, abstract their minds, judge their conduct, or reject them: they are wholly tangible wonders to be displayed. In their sensible uniqueness, their multiplicity, and their vitality lie their beauty and fascination: not in goodness, wisdom, success, or — least of all — martyrdom:

> In Breughel's great picture, The Kermess,
> the dancers go round, they go round and

around, the squeal and the blare and the
tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles
tipping their bellies (round as the thick-
sided glasses whose wash they impound)
their hips and their bellies off balance
to turn them. Kicking and rolling about
the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those
shanks must be sound to bear up under such
rollicking measures, prance as they dance
in Breughel's great picture, The Kermess.

A celebration of the senses underlies Williams' personal values. He writes as though the act of looking or smelling were in itself a vivid pleasure; for him even moral insight is an exercise which, however grim its conclusions, remains exhilarating. In 'The Yachts' he unites the pleasures of employing one's senses with this thrill of moral insight. The outcome seems an exuberant poem although the implications are tragic. In adjectives connoting live creatures, he describes the beautiful, protected, carefully-groomed boats. Several details are consciously 'poetic': in lines 6-7, 'Mothlike in mists', etc.; in lines 16-18, 'youthful, rare', etc. Then he suddenly interrupts their felicity with an apparently irrelevant picture of humans, already shown as subordinate beings, who bear up this joy which they cannot participate in (the poem was written during the Slump) — the men are fuel for the machines. Through a great number of pyrrhics and very irregular pauses, he produces the wavy motion of the scene. This rhythm grows heavy in the ninth tercet, 'Arms with hands', etc., as the violent second picture sweeps across the first. Then the rhythm fades into the regular lapping of the final lines, where repetition, assonance, and internal rhyme help to soften the movement:

The Yachts

contend in a sea which the land partly encloses
shielding them from the too heavy blows
of an ungoverned ocean which when it chooses

tortures the biggest hulls, the best man knows
to pit against its beatings, and sinks them pitilessly.
Mothlike in mists, scintillant in the minute

brilliance of cloudless days, with broad bellying sails
they glide to the wind tossing green water
from their sharp prows while over them the crew crawls

ant like, solicitously grooming them, releasing,
making fast as they turn, lean far over and having
caught the wind again, side by side, head for the mark.

In a well guarded arena of open water surrounded by
lesser and greater craft which, sycophant, lumbering
and flittering follow them, they appear youthful, rare

as the light of a happy eye, live with the grace
of all that in the mind is feckless, free and
naturally to be desired. Now the sea which holds them

is moody, lapping their glossy sides, as if feeling
for some slightest flaw but fails completely.
Today no race. Then the wind comes again. The yachts

move, jockeying for a start, the signal is set and they
are off. Now the waves strike at them but they are too
well made, they slip through, though they take in canvas.

Arms with hands grasping seek to clutch at the prows.
Bodies thrown reckless in the way are cut aside.
It is a sea of faces about them in agony, in despair

until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind,
the whole sea become an entanglement of watery bodies
lost to the world bearing what they cannot hold. Broken,

beaten, desolate, reaching from the dead to be taken up
they cry out, failing, failing! their cries rising
in waves still as the skilful yachts pass over.

Williams' poetry shows how one author can fit failure, pain, and death into a mood of exhilaration without risking the name of sentimentalist. In the way of form and organisation he can give few leads to those who are reviving conventional designs; nor do I suggest either that this revival is an error or that its road is inferior to his. However, most modern British poetry which has no religious setting tends toward the hesitant, the pathetically ironic, the self-pitying, the desperate. Religious poets may despair as well as affirm; but the secular seem never to find in themselves a spring of warm and cheerful acceptance. I do not recommend Dr Williams as a model to be imitated or as *the* way for young poets, but rather as someone worth looking at for qualities hard to find and often demanded in England today.

By 'religious' I mean preoccupied with supernatural values,

whether these belong to a traditional sect, as in Eliot; to a fairly original system, as in Blake and Yeats; to something between, as in Edwin Muir; or to an evangelical attack on these, as in Swinburne. By 'secular', I mean accepting the human and natural as the source of all values. The secular poet does not oppose religion or deny its significance to others; he feels no need of it himself, though he may at times use Christian metaphors to dramatise his secular attitudes. For me, Whitman, Pound, and Dylan Thomas are secular poets. By my definitions a writer may be religious without being moral, or pessimistic without being secular. By hopeful I mean cheerful, affirmative, preoccupied with the attractions and joys of living; I do not mean sentimental or indifferent to evil. By pessimistic I mean gloomy, or concerned with the triviality of misery of human problems. Much of Walter de la Mare seems religious and hopeful; much of Donne sounds religious and gloomy; A. E. Housman is often secular, pessimistic, and immoral; Henley is immoral and optimistic. Many of Herrick's poems seem to me cheerful, moral, and secular. (All these definitions are evocative, not precise; anyone who cares to destroy them by a semantic analysis will find the job easy enough.)

The absence of secular optimism as a tradition behind recent English poetry is fundamentally an effect of the unhappy outlook for England as a nation since the Second War. But it also has something to do with the enormous stores of metaphor and moral allusion in Anglicanism. The continuity of the Church of England as an institution, its establishment, and its intimacy with the literary tradition give it irresistible allure as a source of powerful evocations. I can conceive of a dedicated poet growing into religious feelings in order that he might sincerely draw on this arsenal. Since, however, the power of these wares rests in their significance rather than their sensuous structure, one can, by relying on them, encourage himself to put too little trust in technical resources. Religious appeals depend for their success on sincerity rather than taste. For evangelical purposes Mozart must yield to a Salvation Army band. By corollary, a poet like Kathleen Raine, who worries first about the religious implications of her work, tends to divorce herself from experiments in rhythm and texture.

Not since the seventeenth century has there been a strong tradition of secular optimism in England; and then (Herrick is an example) it accompanied a deep respect for craftsmanship. One sees many young English writers now properly busy with problems of technique and commonly using secular attitudes. But within those lines they draw, for the most part, on a gloomy, trivial, or self-deprecating tradition since Hardy. In the recent British vein one may be only a religious pessimist, a religious optimist, or a secular pessimist.

To this modest degree Americans may have an advantage. Their optimism depends most deeply on the growth of their country's material

and political strength. But in addition they possess no religious traditions so powerful as the central place of the Established Church in English history (not to mention the Anglican liturgy or even cathedral architecture). Secular optimism, going back at least to Whitman, is far simpler for them; and problems of method have been at the centre of their poetic tradition during the last fifty years. Thus what an English poet and critic like Edwin Muir complains of in the language of moral values, an American poet and critic like Horace Gregory puts in the language of technique: recent English verse, says Muir, is 'neat, muted, and despondent' (*Observer*, 14 October). But Horace Gregory says, 'The curse of contemporary British verse is an imageless run of too many toneless words' (*Partisan Review*, Fall, 1956).

These currents among writers might mean less if they did not involve as well the spirit of recent literary criticism. The sense-meaning of words and symbols, the total structure of a poem, the semantic relationships of images — these are the primary business of most youngish commentators. The impact of the poem as a direct experience, the charm (as distinct from either elevation or wit) of its attitudes, the sensuous attractions of its texture, the pleasures of separate lines as distinct from and independent of total structure — these accept a subordinate place. But so long as critics devote themselves to the sense or ambiguity of a poet's vocabulary, to symbolic implications and comprehensive patterns, they are driven to seek terms which can control such large, abstract realms; and unless the work is a narrative or drama, these terms are likely to be moral. If the implications of a lyric poem must be traced to their ultimate references, the ultimates will probably appear as ethical doctrines. The critic will then discover that he is handling principles of right conduct as the framework within which works of art operate. Unconsciously, he will tend to give special praise to poems in which such a framework is discernible. Frequently, therefore, one finds the contemporary critic preferring writers who give overt expression to spiritual or religious values and deprecating the use of language 'merely' to embody an individual vision of this world with all the intensity and sensuous appeal possible. Consequently, critics often praise writers who may not come up to the literary genius of a Wallace Stevens or Marianne Moore but whose ethical references seem sound. Thus Alfred Alvarez names, as the best of the younger American poets, Richard Eberhart (one of our least individual but most Christian versifiers) and Robert Lowell, a Christian mystic (*Observer*, 9 September). Even in appreciating *The Less Deceived*, by Philip Larkin — a writer whom I should describe as secular — reviewer after reviewer names his 'Church Going' as the greatest success in the book.

It seems to me that some of the young poets complimented on their spiritual insight are not natively pious and might be glad to look at (*not* imitate) a positive, hopeful alternative to the religious tradition.

And some of those who appear (to British viewers) thin or trivial in their agnosticism might be encouraged by a hearty and buoyant — but not athletic, sentimental, or Henleyesque — example. I myself find an author like Philip Larkin admirable as he stands, and I am certainly not so arrogant as to suggest that he wants a different *stimmung*. But John Press, for instance, complains of the bleakness and gloom in a similar poet, while remarking, without disapproval, that 'he cannot find consolation in nature or healing wisdom in religious faith' (*Sunday Times*, 11 November). Since the Second War, new poets have been increasingly subjected to such complaints; and a *TLS* reviewer says, 'What one might call the primitive eye — the eye, that is, which seems to respond quite freshly and directly to objects and situations, without literary overtones, is rare in recent English poetry' (28 September). If indeed one wants this sort of eye, and ear, observing with charity but without moralising, with energy but not energy-worship, if one wants comedy without satire and tragedy without despair, he will find them in Dr Williams.

MAIRI MacINNES

A Year's Marriage : West Berlin

When you come to the door I sing
for lack of silence all one year —
for all we are already, all we say in secret; for
nothing new, nothing unknown before.
In a lifelong conversation anywhere begun
what's an occasion?
Where's the anniversary in a continuum?
Black trees with their uplifted arms
are monumental in the snow of any land,
and any gulls flag out the air
for our wedding day a year ago.

The place we started from was never home;
nor's this strange anachronistic city full of calm.
Here hope is castaway, and fear of war
draws and relaxes the seas of mood
like a far-off wayward moon.
A slow permissive alien regime protects and withholds.
The city grows under a bell-glass.
Buildings rise on ruins, gardens are planted,
markets are held and hawkers cry —
around, the cold plain stretches in the grip of another world.
Refugees seep inward like a thaw.

Candles shine along street windows and glitter on the frost
at New Year's Eve, for prisoners in the east.
Candles shine for symbol
but the living unsymbolic people
are dumb as candles.
They wait for meaning to be put on them.
Too soon houses will endure entrance, snows will run
and candles gutter. The human predicament extends
beyond the trauma and the dream.

Twelve months, five hundred miles away
from clerk and registry
by our uncalendared mutuality
we are uprooted daily from the dead
unforgiving earth of the past. Now as we lie close in one bed,
I forgive you, you forgive me
for our unbeleaguered liberty.
Better to celebrate love to the sound of flutes in southern woods
than the echo of guns practising at daybreak.
The scenery of an old war was never one for lovers.
Sir, married we may be impatient of the dove,
but over our luggage let her brood,
as long as lonely lions stalk
by Minnesotan lakes and the broken towns
from Ushant eastwards; such places as we live
make common language with our love
and with the sun and the next traveller.

JUDY SPINK

Honesty in Love

You, loving so undoubtedly,
Cried, that I cry not to the waves
My love more strong than sea;
Nor even pattern stealthily
My heart in beer upon the table.
But if you wring from me a fable
Of perfect love, of rose-like, grave
Rebirth of purity, you will
Make old lies possible again:
Silence for certain saves
From words which may be true, but still
Tie in a false chain.

I have gone cheating, threading dark
Lines of deceit, to my soft shame,
So now my tongue will mark
All truth between us if I talk.
O trust the harmless hands, the heart,
My tortuous head, sole sinning part,
Betrays you hourly, makes a game
Of loving's perilous sweet chance.
Not yet the integrity I learn
Makes thought and pulse the same:
Let my mouth keep a sea-change trance
Until its truth return.

PETER FERGUSON

Introit

Who calls them now but walks again
The windless landscape of a travelled dream,
Where tardy phantoms seem
To enact a meaning long since vain.

Who worships them stands by a grave
Knee-deep in grass, lays offerings by its side,
Sure that they have not died,
Though he has lost all they once gave.

At sea, the tidal waters wash
Each other's impress away; the sky is one
With darkness now, the sun
A crumbled skeleton of ash.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

A Baptism

From where we lay in lover's dark
The dancers at the windows whirled
Restless and pent in a bright room.
Our motions were sacred as the sea's.

But then the lights came sundering on
And stared us back into our selves,
Bright, smiling, severed you and I.
We danced. What could we do but dance?

Now therefore do we baptise him
For the holy sake of that dark ghost
We pent nine months ago inside
His fat, incredible, bright self.

CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

by Raymond Williams

IN 1950 it seemed that a phase in the development of modern English verse drama had been completed, and that a new and extending phase had a fair chance of being inaugurated. Verse plays had come out of the world of club and semi-private performance, into the ordinary theatre where in the end acceptance has to be won. The breakthrough was small, but it seemed the beginning of something bigger, especially since opinion among writers and performers seemed to be gathering behind it. Now, six years later, we have to recognise that the extension has not happened, and even that some of the footholds have been lost. Is this because we were looking for the wrong thing, or because problems we thought solved had been only evaded, or simply because this is the way any minority movement, set against the powerful material structure of the majority, is bound to go? I don't want to dwell on this last point too much, because the problem is sufficiently obvious. To look at the London theatre as a whole is not to gain the impression of a people greatly interested in drama; there is interest, but only as the quiver of a

needle within a dominant bearing — audiences don't seem to want drama, they want a 'show', and, in the matter of shows, the dramatic tradition can't really compete. It is so generally: the hardness and liveliness of the best contemporary poetry can't really compete with the fake hardness and liveliness of journalism, and this isn't solved by poets becoming journalists, or by dramatists becoming showmen. Personal disappointments can be rationalised that way, but it doesn't help with the difficulties of a tradition.

However we judge these material factors, though, we have still to say that it is the business of writers to create their audiences, and if this is so we have to be sure what kind of audience is wanted, what kind of interest is being offered, what principle the writer aligns himself on. The difficulties of recent years are not only general and material; they are also difficulties of principle and morale, within the dramatic effort. I return to the immediate questions: were we looking for the wrong thing; had problems we thought solved been only evaded?

I get a sense from people in their twenties, about ten years younger than myself, that the emphasis on poetic drama is now considered wrong. There seems more vitality, to them, in the latest kind of realism, than in plays like *The Confidential Clerk*, which is the most recent offering of an alternative. And I agree that it would be difficult for any play to have less vitality than *The Confidential Clerk*: if this is the climax of modern English verse drama, then let the thing go. But what I will call Brando-realism, which seems now to be the mode, is as temporary as a fashion in jazz. This hard, uncommunicative, active mode is certainly a contemporary face, but it has been pulled too often before, and its sterility is all too quickly discovered. There is always a place for plays which express, even crudely, this kind of rough feeling in which a generation under stress can, for a few years, find unity and meaning. Let's scowl and curse and shout and get it done with; this sort of coarse anger is creative for a time. But in the end anger and disillusion have to be returned to their real sources in feeling, within a whole human situation, and, when this happens, we shall be back again at the problem of an adequate method, dramatically, for the exploration of the whole human consciousness. The shout is only the first, if necessary, act.

Then again I'm not impressed by the other cliché that is forming: that we need a new Shaw. How exciting it would be, we are told, if somebody with Shaw's wit and liveliness in argument, but with some new ideas, suddenly burst on to our stages. I agree; it would be exciting, especially the new ideas. I only hope these new ideas won't be the kind of whoring after Hulme and anti-humanism of which we're already seeing too much. We need something a bit more exciting, and a bit newer, than that. Still, if the cliché were realised, what should we have got? Something real, certainly, but as certainly something minor. The

play of ideas is important when society is shifting, and when there is some kind of mental shift within the class which forms a likely theatre audience. Shaw hit the English middle-class at just the time when a century's criticism of industrialism and bourgeois liberalism was beginning to filter through. He didn't need new ideas; the shape of the rethinking was already there. What was needed was enough forensic brilliance to exploit this, and Shaw had it. I may be wrong, but I don't see any such general rethinking going on now — ' new thinking ' has indeed become a euphemism for retreat. And unless there is a general rethinking, the ' play of ideas ' can't operate. For, in such a play, the ideas have to be already separate and recognisable entities; have to be there, so to say, quite independently of the dramatic situation. Such plays arrange an action to demonstrate a thesis, arrange a meeting to deliver a manifesto, and the audience must be with them, waiting to be lectured or rehearsed or made fun of. Otherwise, you can't write a play of ideas, but only a play. There are more ideas in *Hamlet* than in *Candida*, yet the latter is a ' play of ideas ', as I've been describing it, and the former is not. For the function of the play of ideas is to transmit and to popularise; when the ideas are wrought out in a whole dramatic situation, and are given their whole content and pressure by what the play creates in terms of feeling, you have something different, in the main dramatic tradition. Still, if Shaw Junior turns up, good luck to him: a lively dramatic argument is better than a dead theatrical confection.

We were not looking for the wrong thing, when we looked for contemporary poetic drama. The offered alternatives are no more than symptoms of a confusion. It is this confusion we must turn to: the question ' had problems we thought solved been only evaded?' To answer this, I must go back a little to the beginning of modern naturalist drama. I have to keep saying (I've been misquoted enough) that naturalism in the period 1860-1914 was a necessary creative movement. To follow Ibsen's development from his apprenticeship in a decaying romantic drama to his mastery in the new naturalism is to realise this once for all. The return from empty theatrical artifice to something like life had to be made. But, at once, naturalism acquired two senses. There was that of Ibsen or Chekhov, where the medium was representation of actuality, but the pressure was a movement of feeling, deeply and personally lived through. This is quite different from the false naturalism of which we have had many more examples: where the old forms of feeling were taken out of stock and put into modern dress — actuality of representation being merely a device to disguise the deadness of the feeling. False naturalism we still get, and can still simply oppose. Real naturalism is more difficult; we have to honour it, but also question it. The major question is one of language. Actuality of representation seemed necessarily to involve limiting

dramatic writing to probable conversation, and there were obvious limits, in the matter both of depth and of intensity of feeling, to what probable conversation could handle or infer. There may still be some life in genuine naturalism, particularly in the cinema, or in local cases when a new situation or a new feeling can be dramatised fairly easily. But the break for poetic drama was made on the issue of language: why should we limit the range and intensity of known dramatic speech to probable contemporary conversation? It was a writer's revolt, and seemed successful. Yeats first, and then Eliot and Auden, in fact found a form of lively and contemporary dramatic speech which was capable, at least at times, of intensity and depth. When this had been done, we thought the way was clear, but of course it wasn't, because drama isn't only a matter of writing. Two problems are now clear, one technical, one general.

The technical problem is a matter of acting. It is in fact very difficult to speak dramatic verse, with full adherence to the forms and rhythms which determine it, if at the same time you remain faithful to the kinds of movement in which actors have been trained for the representation of actuality. Either the forms and rhythms go, get blurred and intermittent, slurred and even virtuously thrown away. Or what? In *The Confidential Clerk* there was a good example, when there were two scenes of relatively intense verse to be acted. The actors wanted to keep the intensity, but they could only do this by sitting down. At most, one could move around a bit while the other talked, and then vice-versa. It became comic, really, because you could sense the relief when the rhythms slackened and the play could (so to say) go on. Was verse-drama, then, to be this kind of pageant interlude?

There are two minor ways out: either the play can become historical or mythical — people in the 'olden times', or mythical personages, are allowed a bit of artificiality. Or, don't put the play on a stage, but on the wireless; there are then no problems of movement, but only of the voice following the forms and rhythms. The continuing relative success of broadcast verse plays is significant evidence. This is all right, and so are history and myth. But when you're competing with naturalism, as poetic drama now has to, you can't afford to neglect the contemporary. History is adequate if you want a simple religious play, although it often verges on the naive. Or it is adequate with some strong political interest. Myth again is adequate, although it becomes much more lively when it is made contemporary, as in Anouilh or Beckett. But it is here that the general problem reminds us of its presence.

Actors have to be pliable, and the present difficulty is not really their fault. The writers' revolt against naturalism was too specialised — too much an isolation of language, which is only one of the elements of dramatic performance. Writers now must learn to work with actors,

in a different kind of reform. The problem is the compatibility of relatively formal dramatic speech with relatively informal movement and action. The movement problem is only soluble within a reform of action as a whole. Eliot's dramatic development is the most melancholy evidence. In *Murder in the Cathedral* the historical formula allowed enough formalisation of action to substantiate the dramatic verse. In *Family Reunion* certain formal elements were inserted (not very happily) into an apparently actual contemporary situation. But, once the contemporary situation was there, it gradually took charge. Still committed to the representation of actuality, the contemporary element gradually diluted the form and intensity of the dramatic language. When *The Confidential Clerk* ended with a silent significant nod it seemed like the end of an era. I hope it was; we don't want more plays like that. But no one else has got further. The naturalist habit, it seems, is still too strong. Do we believe, or do we not, that we can have plays about contemporary feelings and people and situations in any other than naturalist terms? If we do not believe, then let us get back to the best naturalism, quickly, rather than stay in this kind of hybrid. Yet is this the only possible conclusion? I think there are others. If we start thinking of dramatic action again, in the full sense, we shall use representation when it's essential, and drop it when it isn't. From Brecht on the stage, and from sister-arts like opera and ballet, we can see surely enough examples of forms of dramatic action beyond naturalism. There is indeed a dominant mood in the theatre against simple representation. The issue returns squarely to writers. Let dramatic action be conceived as the form and pressure of the originating feeling, not merely as imitation of the naturalist version of actuality. If answering the telephone and lighting a cigarette and pouring a drink and negotiating the furniture are going to break up the verse forms and rhythms, then, if the verse is worth it, drop the telephone, drop the drink, drop the cigarette, throw out the furniture, and work out instead some essential action which will embody the real feeling. Let audiences be persuaded that the play is alive by a considered and co-ordinated intensity of speech and action, rather than by being shown yet again that actors can dress up like people and have the same difficulties with cigarettes.

I don't mean, I'd better add, dance-drama, or speech-opera, or poetic ballet. Let these come, by all means, but in the central tradition the necessary adjustments are not so extreme. If we drop the overriding naturalist intention, many forms of realism, many known and acceptable theatrical conventions, at once offer their aid. Similarly, with the language. Let the Eliot kind of all-purpose rhythm go; it was only ever a naturalist compromise. Let forms and rhythms be determined by the structure of the dramatic feeling; verse is not the important emphasis; a living relation between language and the structure is what

really matters, and what versified naturalism can't have.

All I have offered here is an emphasis; I have tried to work the thing out in more detail elsewhere. But the emphasis is worth offering, since the possibility of completing the reform of our drama is still really very near, and it is only temporarily, and under stress, that we have lost our sense of direction.

ENSLAVED BY A DREAD DIZZIZ

The Faber Book of Modern American Verse, edited by W. H. Auden. (Faber & Faber Ltd., 21/-.)
First Communion, and other poems, Chris Bjerknes. (Olivant House, $2.00.)
The Simon Passion, Henry Birnbaum (Olivant House, 50 cents.)
Spectre in the Fantastic Laboratory, Jay Pell. (Inferno Press, $2.00.)

I SUPPOSE 'a broad picture of American poetry today' was bound to be given to us sooner or later, but this Faber anthology does tend to remind one of Aristotle's animal of a thousand miles in length; so that, although it may be (as the blurb again puts it) 'comprehensive', I certainly found it too bulky to be properly comprehended. Any anthologist has the choice of either putting in what he thinks to be the best poems of the period, which restricts the selected authors to about ten, or conveying the depth, richness, etc., of the period, and emerging with 700 tightly-packed pages of thin rice-paper. Mr Auden, by trying to avoid the extremes, manages to produce something which is neither going to be open in a scholar's study nor, unlike Eupheus, shut in a lady's casket. The impression one receives is of a few major writers (Frost, Stevens, Williams, Pound, Moore, Cummings, Hart Crane, Roethke, Patchen — which is a great many for a half-century) and a host of potentially happy minors all trying to be majors. The dread disease of would-be grandeur seems to have enslaved them all, and small, well-shaped talents swell into monstrous contortions. Humourlessness is also epidemic, the only two 'funnies', Parker and Nash, being simply comic versifiers, and not poets in the way that Plomer, Durrell, MacNeice and Auden manage to be in their light verse. Frankly, I believe this impression of American verse to be quite false, and due to a system that represents too many poets with too few poems. Each poet thus appears in his best Sunday poetic clothes; an unexciting display. Still, this volume has definite merits: the introduction is good; the poets who are fortunate enough to exceed the five-poem mark are represented with a thoroughness that argues Mr Auden's good taste (Cummings and Marianne Moore are particularly well done); it was a relief to find Eberhardt not with the Groundhog, and to see some poems by Carlos Williams which were a fair indication at last of just what a major talent his is. But it hardly accomplishes any wider function than the Penguin volume, and why it should include three poets who died before 1918 I just don't know.

However, for the real, quintessential dullness we must go to Mr Birnbaum,

who has the disease in a big way; his symptoms being allegory, an obsession with problems which one can't imagine anyone else worrying about, and sad spasms such as, 'The gulls / Sweep sea-scape / Against the peripheral geometry of steel'. Mr Bjerknes is a similar case. In a review of an earlier book Mr Bergonzi asked, 'Who would be rash enough to say there is no hope for Mr Bjerknes?' With the appearance of this volume there is no need for rashness, since a slender talent for natural description has been, at last, successfully swamped in metrical chaos, incoherent metaphysics, and a confusion of echoes from The Four Quartets. From such wreckage even an abortive SOS seems out of the question.

Jay Pell is an entirely different matter. I can't say I enjoyed his book, but underneath the amazing diction there appeared to lurk genuine poems. He has a considerable talent for satire, and once he can escape from the charlatanism of this sort of thing,

> 'Chained with latex links in the nine-circle church
> Of derby-and-lysol love and lonely confessionals', etc.

he may be able to achieve something of importance. His next volume will be worth waiting for.

Dennis Keene

A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

Bread rather than Blossoms, D. J. Enright. (Secker and Warburg, 10/6.)
The Deserted Altar, D. L. Posner. (Basil Blackwell, 3/6.)

MR ENRIGHT may often strike us as out of place among his fellow-poets of 'The Movement'. He does not use the strict forms of Larkin, Amis, or Wain; does not employ the forceful 'wit' of Dr Davie, or the philosophical abstractions of Miss Jennings. He is linked to them primarily by his express desire to write 'poetry that is *about* something, poetry that is about people — preferably other people.' Like all these poets, he is obsessed with the relationship between art and life — he impatiently rejects 'verbal music' because he wants poetry to *mean* something to the reader.

In this concern to make poetry more accessible to the reader, we have a parallelism of the 'thirties and the 'fifties not often discussed. Dr Davie's poem, *Remembering the 'Thirties*, illustrates both the Movement's awareness and its distrust of the bond. True, our young poets are not quite so naive in their attitudes to the 'People', but their own disingenuousness springs from acknowledgment of the mistakes of the 'thirties. The parallel is made more forcibly in Mr Enright's case when we point out that his poems spring from his concern at the political and social situation in Japan today — like Spender and Vienna, Auden and Spain.

Wain's determination to debunk; Amis's light-music rhythms and forms; the melancholy toughness of the Larkin *persona*; the nagging social conscience of Enright — all seem to me to constitute something of a reversion to the 'thirties manner. Perhaps this reversion was necessarily part of these poets' rejection of the Romantic poetry of the 'forties; it is ironic to think that their

poetry is, in a sense, the most Romantic of these three decades. Instead of speaking in terms of the Marxist dialectic (for example), these poets refer habitually to the *personal* in *experience*. Mr Enright is at times painfully honest, and it is a Romantic honesty, seeing the self as representative of humanity. The title, *Nasty Thoughts of a Nasty Fellow*, suggests the insecurity of this self-consciousness.

Mr Enright admires Ezra Pound, and has developed the form and style of some of his poems — notably the later *Lustra*; they are best described, I think, as 'structures in meaning'. *Confucius forgot to say* illustrates the point well. This poem breaks into three sections. (1) The poet sees a neon sign swinging about in the night sky. It swings from a balloon, but he thinks himself drunk, and goes home safe to bed. (2) Next night he sees the same, but

> . . . drank some more and fell down the stairs
> It was not suspended from any fat invisible balloon.

(3) Moral: 'Do not call an angry world to account for all your queer sensations.'

Like so many in *Lustra*, this poem depends for its effect on the parallelism of incident and the bathos. And to be successful, it is the *tone* of the poem that matters, that will lead us on *through* the structure of the poem to its conclusion.

Mr Enright's tone is consistently successful. But I feel that there is not sufficient discipline in his work. Having mastered 'tone', he should now attend to the 'feeling' of words. Otherwise there is a danger of flaccidity, also of the verbal trickery of a poem like Cryptogram:

> 'For crypto-undisarmament the slippery voices call
> and crypto-conscripts jump
> To line a crypto-politic.'

Mr Enright's social consciousness will bother some readers, I'm afraid. In the social, contemporary context, the moral of his poem is often all too simple, where in the context of the poem's structural necessities it is faultless. This is a discipline for the reader — to distinguish social comment from poetry. I hope, at any rate, that his book will be read. Honesty and intelligence are worth having at any price.

. . .

As for Mr Posner, least said, soonest mended. Good intentions and a pastiche style are the sum of his work. Did Newdigate deserve it?

Martin Dodsworth

January, 1957. DEPARTURE is published three times a year. Contributions of poetry, prose and criticism are welcomed. These should be accompanied by a stamped-addressed envelope, or, if sent from abroad, by an International Reply Coupon, and should be addressed to the Editors either at Lincoln College or at St John's College, Oxford.
Business and Circulation Manager: Derek Hill, St John's College, Oxford.
Subscription: for single copy 1/2 or 35c post free; for one year 3/6 or one dollar.